

In the spring of 1946, Mr. And Mrs. Samuel Berg arrived in the United States. Both had been born and raised in Stuttgart, Germany. Both had spent two years as prisoners at Auschwitz. Samuel Berg's first wife and two young sons had been gassed immediately upon their arrival in Auschwitz. Hedwig Berg had no children but her husband of 8 years dies of Typhus within 6 months of his arrival in Auschwitz.

Hedwig and Samuel met in a displaced person's camp in Austria in September of 1945. They lived with thousands of other Holocaust survivors where they were clothed, fed and medically cared for. It was quite common for Jewish survivors of the concentration camps who had lost their "first families" to meet one another, fall in love and together rebuild their lives. Samuel and Hedwig Berg were married while living in a displaced persons' camp. Samuel had an elderly cousin who left Germany in the 1920's and had settled in Montgomery, Alabama. This cousin helped the Berg's acquire visas and the necessary papers needed for immigration. The Bergs arrived on Ellis Island on March 5, 1946. Samuel's cousin and Hedwig's family met them in New York. After a one-night stay in a New hotel, the Bergs and their families took a train to Montgomery, Alabama. The Bergs remained 6 months in Montgomery. Both found employment in a shoe factory. The Bergs hated Montgomery and were able to find temporary housing and jobs in Detroit, Michigan through the aid of another distant relative.

Why did the Bergs hate Montgomery, Alabama? You will find the answer in the following personal accounts of racism in American.

The children laugh, almost disbelieving my memories of growing up in Natchez, Mississippi during the 1950s and 60s. Maybe one day I will write a book, just for them. Pictures in a book of "White only" signs above entrances and water fountains are like "whatnots" on a table, harmless and quiet, unable to reveal the real crime against humanity. And I've got a book in me.

A "white only" sign above the only bus or train depot entrance in a thunderstorm, with your mama getting soaked, holding a shoebox full of food because restaurants serve "white only" is another matter altogether.

Approaching the dentist's office, we would swing to the rear to the "colored" waiting room, the back porch and wooden benches. We couldn't show enough gratitude and we waited in winter coats, raincoats, and in sweltering summer heat.

The "white only" public school threw their outdated books to the "colored" schools, instead of in the trash. But our diligent teachers taught us to sand the outer edges so the books would at least appear clean and we made book covers from brown grocery bags.

We could buy everything in the dime store but a soda or a burger from the same dime store's lunch counter. All hotel rooms were "white only." We watched movies from the segregated "colored" balcony of the theaters. People were beaten and killed or just disappeared because voting was for "whites only." A "white only" ambulance couldn't

respond to a “colored” emergency, so local “colored” funeral homes provided this service to our community, though they had no medical training.

Most horrendous of all is the still unsolved murder of Wharlest Jackson, whose truck was bombed as he drove home from work, having been recently moved from custodial duties to a “white man’s job” of painting tires at the plant. Oh, the murders, all over Mississippi.

Like I said, I gotta book in me.

Anonymous,
Avondale Estates, MS

My mother tells a story of when I was born in 1964, my father and mother came back from the hospital in Asheboro, NC on NC-49 from Asheboro to Ramseur and my mother asked my father to stop and get my bottle warmed up at a diner called The Blue Mist. This was important in that up until that time, my father had worked there. (There is a picture of him with an order of food, which he was taking to a black person in the back of the store; a sign above his head says “colored entrance.”) On the way home with me, my mother wanted my dad to go to the front counter and ask a person there to warm my bottle up for me. My dad went inside and the person on the other side of the counter said yes. My bottle was warmed and we went on our way as my mother tells the story. My mother also still has that picture of my dad at the back door so that we never forgot.

Marcus C. Staley II
Raleigh, NC

I grew up in New York City. Relatives in Miami Beach, Florida had a daughter my age and the families got us together. When we were about ten, she came to New York to visit then I went to Miami during school holiday. We were in a Woolworth’s and I went to take a drink of water at the fountain. My friend was horrified and stopped me because there was a sign that said “colored.” She said I had to drink out of the other fountain that read “white.” I remember being horrified, angry and totally outraged. I couldn’t understand why there was a difference. I remember telling her I was going to drink out of it anyway and she started crying, that we would be arrested for drinking out of the “colored” fountain. That scared me (was only 10 or 11) and I didn’t do it. But I remember asking her parents about it (although I don’t remember what they said) and telling mine when I got home, and I swore I’d never do that again. And I didn’t. Each time I traveled to the South I would make a point of drinking from the “colored” fountain. I never got arrested although I did get dirty looks, which made me feel proud.

Liz Schick
Richmond, VT

I am now 54 years old and I distinctly remember the water fountains in a department store with signs stating white and colored. Of course, I drank out of the white just to see if there was a difference. I must have been between six and eight years old.

R. Anne Clay
Savannah, GA

I was born and raised in the north in St. Louis, Missouri. As a youngster of five or six, in the summers my mother would take me and my brothers to Mississippi to see my grandmother where we would spend the summer. What a lot of kids only read about I saw – the separate water fountains, bathrooms, and the movie theaters where the balcony was for colored only (still persisted in the early 70s). This was really a shock for me.

Mom always taught us to love and respect everyone. Nothing momma told me could have prepared me for what I saw. Mom also said that I could be anything I wanted, but that I'd have to work three or four times harder to get it, whereas a white person, just being white was their free admission.

Richard Hill
St. Paul, MN

For more stories of personal experiences with racism, go to the website entitled "Remembering Jim Crow: Presented by American Radio Works" at:
<http://www.americanradioworks.org/features/remembering/read.html>